

Introduction

Everyday, approximately 80-100,000 young people around the world become addicted to tobacco. If current trends continue, 250 million children alive today will die from tobacco-related diseases. Currently, about 80% of the world's tobacco users live in developing countries. By 2030, 70% of all deaths from tobacco will occur in developing countries, up from approximately 50% today. Tobacco will soon become the leading cause of death worldwide, causing more deaths than HIV, maternal mortality, automobile accidents, homicide and suicide combined.

The Republic of Palau's first nationwide comprehensive survey on youth tobacco use – Youth Tobacco Survey 2001 – reveals that Palau is not immune from the tobacco epidemic and tobacco's global toll. For instance, over half of the students surveyed are current tobacco users, and Palauan youth are using tobacco at overwhelmingly higher rates than American youth, due largely to the practice of chewing betelnut with tobacco.

The Palau Youth Tobacco Survey (PYTS) was developed by the Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Program, Ministry of Health, and the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Palau, with assistance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and implemented with the collaboration of the Ministry of Education. The Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) instrument was prepared by the CDC, and additional questions, specific to Palau, were added (eg. questions regarding the use of betelnut, etc). Detailed information on the CDC's Youth Tobacco Surveillance and Evaluation System is available from the Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Program.

The purpose of the YTS is to improve the capacity of states, territories or jurisdictions to design, implement, and evaluate their own comprehensive tobacco prevention and control programs, curricula, and policies. The survey is essential for measuring current levels of tobacco use in its various forms, and for future measurement of the effectiveness of tobacco prevention and education programs. This tool is important for Palau to obtain baseline data on knowledge, attitudes and behaviors relating to tobacco use. It is also a useful assessment of other influences that make youth more susceptible to future tobacco use.

The PYTS was given to all students in grades 6-12 in the Republic of Palau, in both private and public schools. All students in these grades were eligible to participate, and were invited to complete an anonymous and confidential self-administered questionnaire comprising of 77 questions. The survey was conducted in all schools in January 2001. Teachers and principals were briefed on the survey methods prior to administration of the survey, and with the cooperation of school officials, one class period was used to deliver the survey to participating students.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs* recommends that states and territories participating in the Youth Tobacco Survey establish tobacco control programs that are comprehensive, sustainable and accountable. Data from the YTS can be used to monitor and evaluate six of the components outlined in the *Best Practices*. These components are:

- Surveillance and evaluation
 - Prevalence of tobacco use
 - Knowledge and attitudes
- Community programs to reduce tobacco use
 - Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke
- School programs
 - Tobacco-related school curriculum
- Enforcement
 - Minor's access to tobacco products
- Counter-marketing
 - Role of media and advertising
- Cessation programs

Results from the Youth Tobacco Survey 2001 are presented under these general headings, to facilitate comparison of the present data with future YTS results in measuring specific objectives.